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Peace in the Quran

At a three-day symposium held at the American University in Washington, on Feb 1998, I made a speech on Islam and Peace in one of its sessions. A part of this speech is given below:

"It is no exaggeration to say that Islam and violence are contradictory to each other. The concept of Islamic violence is so obviously unfounded that *prima facie* it stands rejected. The fact that violence is not sustainable in the present world is sufficient indication that violence as a principle is quite alien to the scheme of things in Islam. Islam claims to be an eternal religion and, as such, could never afford to uphold any principle which could not stand up to the test of time. Any attempt to bracket violence with Islam amounts therefore, to casting doubt upon the very eternity of the Islamic religion. Islamic terrorism is a contradiction in terms, much like 'pacifist' terrorism. And the truth of the matter is that, all the teachings of Islam are based directly or indirectly on the principle of peace."

The teachings of Islam in the Quran and Hadith:

The very word 'Islam' (from the Arabic *silm*) connotes peace. According to a tradition of the Prophet, 'Peace is Islam.' (Al Bukhari) This means that peace is one of the prerequisites of Islam. Similarly, a Hadith states: A Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands people are safe. One of the attributes of God described in the Quran is 'As-Salam', which means peace and security.' That is to say that God's Being itself is a manifestation of peace. Indeed, God is Peace. (Al-Bukhari) In the Quran divine guidance is likened to the paths of peace. (5:16)

According to Islam, Paradise is the ideal place for human abode, and is thus called the 'Home of Peace.' It is also said that the people of paradise will constantly utter the word 'peace.' It means that, the social culture of the people of paradise will be based on peace.

The Quran, avers that, reconciliation is best.' (4:128), and judging by the consequences, the way of peace is far better than that of confrontation. By the law of Nature, God has decreed that success will be met with only on a reconciliatory path, and not on a confrontational or a violent course of action.

The wife of the Prophet of Islam, Aisha (daughter of Abu Bakr) said this of the general policy of the Prophet in social matters: Whenever the Prophet had an option between two courses of action; he always chose the easier (non-confrontational) one. (Bukhari)

This means that, violent activism should not be indulged in if peaceful activism is an option. For, peace, is the easier course as compared to violence.

For instance, trying to change the status quo in the very first stage of a movement is a hard option, while launching one's activities in the available sphere without doing so is an easier option.

Going to war in confrontational situations is a hard option while following conciliatory course in dealing with one's rival is easier. Countering aggression with aggression is a hard option, while countering

aggression with patience and forbearance is an easier option. An agitational course of action is harder than employing quiet strategy. Adopting a radical method of reformation is harder than that of following a gradual method. Taking emotional extreme steps without a thought for their consequences creates difficulties. While a well-considered method, keeping an eye on the consequences, gives much better results. The policy of confrontation with a ruler is a harder option, while initiating one's action, by avoiding the ruler, in the sphere of education and learning is an easier option. These instances show us the easier and harder options, as demonstrated by the Hadith.

The truth is that peace in Islam is the 'rule', while war is the 'exception'. All the teachings of Islam and the practical life of the Prophet of Islam testify to this.

The Example of the Prophet of Islam

The Prophet of Islam received his first revelation in 610 in Makkah. God ordained that he carry out the mission of *Tawhid*. There arose a great problem in relation to this mission.

The house of the Kabah, which was built as the house of monotheism by the Prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail, later on became a centre of polytheism with 360 idols in it. The first revelation might well have demanded the purification of the Kabah. But the first revelation made in the Quran was: Purify your vestments. (74:4) This means to purify one's moral character. If, in the first stage the Prophet had been commanded to purify the Kabah while Makkah was still under the domination of the idolaters, this would have surely precipitated clash and confrontation. Therefore, according to the command of the first revelation, the Prophet continued to perform his prayers peacefully in the Kabah for a period of 13 years, even though it housed several hundred idols.

Similarly, the Prophet and his companions circumambulated the Kabah on the occasion of Umrah al-Hudaybiya in 629. During that time the Kabah still housed 360 idols.

The Prophet of Islam proceeded thus in order to avoid war and confrontation with the idolaters, and so that the atmosphere of peace should be maintained. The entire life of the Prophet is a practical demonstration of this peace loving policy. At the time of migration from Makkah, the idolaters were all set to wage war, but the Prophet avoided this by quietly leaving his homeland for Madina.

On the occasion of the Hudaibiyah treaty in 628, a state of war prevailed. But the Prophet unilaterally accepted all the conditions of the idolaters and negotiated a peace treaty. On the occasion of the battle of Khandaq, the 12,000 strong army of the Quraysh had camped at the borders of Madinah in order to do battle. But the Prophet and his companions dug a long trench to set up a buffer between himself and his enemies, thus avoiding bloodshed.

The mission of Islam is based on monotheism. The goal of Islam is to make people realize the existence of the one and only God and to strive to bring about a revolution in their hearts and minds in order that they may love God as is His due. And the greatest concern of man should be to fear and worship his Creator. (2:165)

Such a *dawah* mission cannot afford wars and violent confrontations. When a state of war and violence

prevails, the normal atmosphere is vitiated and such circumstances as would foster intellectual movements and spiritual reformation cannot be effectively created. It cannot be denied that peaceful circumstances produce a propitious environment for Islam, while violent circumstances inevitably result in antagonism towards Islam.

War: A State Action

In Islam, war is not the prerogative of the individual but of an established government. Only an established government can declare war. In other words, individuals can pray on their own, but they cannot wage wars of their own accord. Only when a war is declared by the ruling government, can the public join in and support it, and not before that. Islam does not sanction individual actions on this issue.

As a general principle, the Quran tells us that, even where an external attack is feared, the common man should not act independently, but should take the matter to the ruler, and then under his guidance take proper counter measures. (4:83)

The Hadith also states that 'the ruler is a shield, fighting is done under him, and security is attained through him.'

This clearly shows that the decision to do battle and its planning are the tasks of an established government. The common man can play his role as need be under government orders, and not independently.

This Islamic principle shows that there is no room for non-state warfare, which is what we generally call guerilla war. A guerilla war is fought by individual organizations, not by the State. As far as the State is concerned, if it wants to wage a defensive war against any country it has first – in obedience to the Quran – to issue a proper declaration. Only then can it wage a lawful war (8:58). In Islam, there is only 'declared' war. Therefore, in accordance with this principle, no proxy war in Islam can be lawful.

Most Islamic actions are governed by certain conditions. The waging of war is also thus subject to certain principles, one being that, even when a defensive war has been declared by the State, it will be aimed only at the combatants. Targeting non-combatants will be unlawful. The Quran enjoins us not to do battle with those who are not at war. Such people have to be dealt with kindly and equitably. But you are free to do battle with those who are fighting against you. (60:8-9)

If, for instance, a Muslim state is at war with a particular nation, and this war is in conformance with Islamic principles it should still not permit any destructive activities against non-combatants (civilians), as was done on September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington. Similarly in Islamic war, Muslim are not permitted to commit suicidal bombings in order to destroy the enemy. Strapping explosives on to oneself and hurling oneself upon the civilian settlements of even those with whom one is at war, for the purpose of destroying the enemy, and in the process killing oneself deliberately, is totally un-Islamic. This can in no way be termed 'Shahadah' (martyrdom). According to Islam we can get martyred, but we cannot court death (martyrdom) deliberately.

(to be continued)

The Purpose of Life

I have only created *Jinns* and men, that they serve Me. 51:56

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship. This is a purpose which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. It raises man to a much higher plane than that of animals. Not a trace of animalism contributes to the achievement of such a goal. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse states; rather He himself is responsible for your livelihood. This means that worship of God is a purpose which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The motive force towards the fulfillment of this purpose is not the urge to satisfy one's needs or those of others. The worshipper seeks neither to gratify his own desires nor those of the Being he worships. It is a purpose which sets before man a goal far above all these things – a goal which does not follow internal needs or external pressures, but results purely from conceptual thought.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But a life of this nature cannot be called a purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. It might seem as if they are the result of deliberation, but if one looks at the matter in depth, one will see that in actual fact the motive force behind these actions is the same urge that motivates an animal in various ways, in its concern for its own survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations which, in fact, guide a person in his search for his livelihood.

When man grows up, he realizes that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live; he requires a reliable source of income to sustain him throughout his life. He is forced by these considerations to obtain these things. Then he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn to a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is being guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status in this world. For this reason these activities cannot be considered as being directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

Man's greater dignity can be based only on a purpose which emanates from inner desires and pressures of circumstances. Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is a purpose loftier than the one towards which an animal directs its energies. It distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one which is in accordance with man's unique status; it must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature.

Spirituality in Islam

(Continued from previous issue)

A Personal Experience

It was Thursday morning, 17th June 1999. I was in Manchester, England, staying in the house of an Arab Brother Alaref Ahmad. While I was sitting in my room on the upper floor, I heard a gentle knock on the door. When I opened it, I found a child of about five years of age. It was Qanita, the first-born daughter of Brother Alaref. She asked in all innocence and gentleness, "Do you need anything?" (*turidu haja*). Perhaps it was her mother who had sent her, and although this was a simple question, I was quite overwhelmed by this innocent voice; to the extent that I could not utter a single word in reply. This was a normal incident, but in my mind, it became transformed into a supra-normal event. Children are like the flowers of God and little angels. I felt as if God Himself had sent me an angel to discover and meet my needs.

At this moment, a famous *hadith* came to mind: "Your Lord descends to this worldly haven every day, looks at His servants and says, 'Is there anyone who has a need and asks Me, that I may give it to him?'" (Muslim).

'Do you need anything?' was a short question that came from an innocent soul, but it was enough to cause a great revolution in my inner being; referred to by modern scholars as 'brainstorming.'

For a while, I felt that I could see the whole of the Universe on the screen of my mind. This was a great spiritual experience which could not be expressed in human words. In the beginning, it seemed as though God, through a little angel, was saying, "O my servant, do you need anything?" Then, the matter extended to include the whole Universe with its Heavens and its Earth.

In fact, it was only a little girl at the door of my room, asking, "Do you need anything?" but in its extended sense, it was as if the whole Universe was asking the same question.

The vast Heaven was saying, "Do you need a shelter? Here I am to provide you with one, because God has ordered me to do so." The gleaming sun was saying, "Do you need light? I am here to supply it and transform your darkness into light." The majestic mountains were announcing, "Would you like to be on the highest level in all humanity? I am here at your service to help you attain that high position." The flowing water in the river-beds was murmuring, "Do you want to have a spiritual bath to purify your soul? I am here to offer you that." And the gusting wind was asking, "Do you want to tour the Universe to see the wondrous signs of God? Here is my back for you to ride on to embark on such a Divine journey." The trees were whispering, "Would you like to have a personality as radiant as ours? We are

here to make your wish a reality.” The fruits on their branches and the crops in their husks were declaring, “If you crave nourishment for your intellectual and spiritual life, we are here to provide you with it.”

While this reel was playing in my mind, I heard birds chirping, “O servant of God! Here is good news for you: If you have a need, then God has made the whole Universe to serve your needs. God is so generous that He has created the whole of the Universe to be at your service, day and night. In addition to this, if you show thankfulness to God, He will give you what is greater than all of this – Eternal Paradise in which there will be “ ... neither fear nor grievance” (6:48).

Then, the following Qur’anic verse came to mind: “And He gave you all that you asked for” (14:34). This means that whatever is needed for Man to live a good life on this Earth has been prepared in advance by God, directly and indirectly. Horses, for instance, were directly created; whereas aeroplanes were provided indirectly. The traveling of the voice through the air is an example of direct provision, while its transmission by means of electronic equipment is a form of indirect provision. Perhaps, this is what is meant by the following Qur’anic verse: “And (He has created) horses, mules and donkeys for you to ride, and as an adornment. And He has created (other) things which are beyond your knowledge” (16:8).

God Almighty says, “O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you. And be grateful to Allah, if it is Him you worship” (2:172). This means that God Almighty has created everything, imaginable and unimaginable; great and small, in the most perfect form. Then, He gave all this free to Man. The only price to be paid for these endless blessings is thankfulness; it is Man’s recognition, from the depths of his heart, that God is the Giver and Man the receiver.

The Qur’an mentions as examples of God’s beneficiaries the people of Saba.’ God Almighty gave them a sign in the, “two Gardens to the right hand and to the left; (and it was said to them:) ‘Eat of the provision of your Lord, and be grateful to Him: fair is your land and Oft-Forgiving is your Lord’”(34:15). This means that if Man pays the price – that is, gratitude – then not only will he be allowed to avail of these blessings, but more importantly, he will also be rewarded with eternal Paradise, which is a perfect version of this present imperfect world of God.

God Almighty bestowed upon Man all these material things which man needs if he is to live a good life on this Earth. All these things are silently conveying the following message: “O Man! Are you seeking something greater than all this? Do you want spiritual peace in addition to material peace? Do you want a world of perfection after this imperfect world? Would you like to taste the blessings of God in the world of eternity after you have tasted them in this ephemeral world? Do you wish to have all these comforts as a blessing in the world to come, after you have had them as a trial in this transient world? Would you like to realize your full potential after experiencing the limitation of your capacities in this present world?”

God created a perfect and complete world as an eternal abode for Man. Then, He wanted to know who was worthy of inhabiting that eternal world. For this purpose, He created the time-bound and imperfect abode in which we are now living. This life, therefore, is only a test. Man is constantly under the observation of his Lord. With every utterance and movement, Man is writing his own eternal destiny. One who, during his pre-death period proves himself through his conduct deserving of that world will, in his post-death-period, be rewarded with admission into it. Others, however, will be flung into the Universal junkyard, that is Hell, condemned for all eternity. So, they will lose both worlds, the present incomplete world as well as the next, perfect and everlasting world.

God has revealed Himself in two books – the Qur'an and the Universe. The Qur'an is a literal version of God's word, while the Universe, or nature, is a practical demonstration of it. These two are the basic sources of spiritual inspiration for a man who seeks to live a life according to the divine scheme.

This dual source of divine inspiration is mentioned in the Qur'an in the following verse: "God is He who raised the Heavens without visible supports, then He ascended the Throne. He has compelled the sun and the moon to be of service, each pursuing an appointed course; He controls the affairs (of the Universe); He makes plain His revelations, so that you may be certain of the meeting with your Lord." (13:2). So, the Qur'an is like a guidebook. It prepares the mind so that one may properly understand the Universe and live in it as desired by God.

So, a *mu'min* (true believer) has precisely that kind of prepared mind. When he sees the Universe with its various parts functioning in an absolutely coherent manner, he will spontaneously say: "There is no god but the one God!" and when he examines it, he will find that there are so many complex happenings in its vastness. Nevertheless, he finds that every part of the universe is highly predictable. With this discovery, he realizes that it is as if God was suggesting that he himself should have a predictable character. When he observes that the various parts of the Universe function with absolute harmony, he realises that, in like manner, he should live in complete harmony with society; without hatred for or malice towards anyone. When he sees the events of the universe always proceeding towards a meaningful result, he realises that man's life, too, must have a meaningful end. Thus he exclaims: "O our Lord! You have not created (all) this without purpose. Glory be to You! Give us salvation from the torment of Hellfire!" (3:191).

In brief, the universe is a manifestation of the attributes of Almighty God. Hence, it is a source of spiritual nourishment for those who want to lead a divine life on earth. For them, the whole universe becomes a great means of their reaching spiritual perfection. This spiritual development continues incessantly throughout their earthly life. As the ultimate result of this life-long developmental process, they attain that degree of spirituality which the Qur'an calls the 'Rabbani soul'. It is such as these who, in the life Hereafter, will be told by their most compassionate Lord: "Dwell in Paradise; you shall have no fear, nor shall you grieve." (7:49)

There is nothing mysterious about spirituality in Islam. It is rather the direct result of the kind of intellectual development that takes place when a believer ponders over the Creator and His creation: he gains something in the process that may be termed spirituality. The source, therefore, of Islamic spirituality is perusal and reflection rather than any sort of mysterious exercise.

That is why the Qur'an rejects asceticism (monasticism), referring to it as a *bida' a* (innovation) in religion which God did not prescribe for people. (57:27)

From the Qur'an we learn that, in the very creation of the universe, the signs of God lie hidden all around us. A person who is in a state of keen awareness when he reflects upon the things of the world comes to see the Creator in the creatures. The meaning of the creation of the Universe is laid bare before him. Ultimately, the universe becomes a permanent source of spiritual inspiration. He is continuously nourished by it during his worldly experience, and his observation of the universe awakens in him latent divine qualities.

The result of this observation and contemplation of the universe does not result in his shunning normal life. Far from withdrawing from the world, he lives in it, participating in all its activities; yet despite his involvement, he remains aloof. That is to say, although he fulfills all his duties and responsibilities, his heart is not attached to worldly affairs. He appears to live in the world, but he stands apart from it. Thanks to this state of his heart, he acquires tremendous spiritual gains. The Prophet Muhammad says of such individuals:

“God plants wisdom in the heart of one who shows disinclination for the world.”

There is life for man in spirituality: this is indeed the real life for man.

Non-Violence and Islam

(Continued from previous issue)

Islam in the Present Age

Now the question arises as to whether an Islam which teaches non-violence can be of relevance in the present age, and assume a superior position once again in new situations.

The answer is entirely in the positive. The truth is that Islam's being a peaceful religion shows that it is an eternal religion. Had it been a religion of violence, it would not have been eternal for, in modern times, the way of violence has been totally rejected by contemporary thinking. Now only that system is worthy of consideration and acceptance the teachings of which are based on peace and non-violence.

Modern thinking, for example, has rejected communism. One of the major reasons was that communism had to be sustained by violence. And under no circumstances is violence acceptable to the modern mind. Nazism and Fascism too have been rejected on similar grounds. Modern man, therefore, disapproves of both religious and non-religious extremism, because they lead man ultimately to violence.

But Islam is a religion of nature. It has held violence as inadmissible from the outset. Islam has been an upholder of peace, not violence, from day one.

In the past, Islam played a great role in the development of humanity, as a result of which human history entered a new age of progress and development. The time has come today for Islam to play a great constructive role, leading human history once again into a new age of progress.

What is called scientific or technical progress is the result of the discovery of some of the great secrets of nature. But if nature and its mysteries have always existed in our world, why has there been such a long delay in their discovery? Why could not the scientific advancement of the last few hundred years have been made thousands of years ago?

The reason was that in ancient times religion and science (divine knowledge and human knowledge) were linked with one another. Religious persecution had become an insuperable obstacle to the progress of science. Scientific enquiry was anathema to men of religion.

What Islam did was separate religion (which had become, in essence, a set of irrational beliefs) from scientific research and investigation. For instance, eclipses of the sun and moon had been linked with human destiny. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, declared that eclipses had nothing to do with the lot of human beings. These were astronomical events, not events pertaining to the fate of mankind. (*Fathul Bari*, 2/611)

In this connection, an incident of the pollination of dates is recorded in the books of *Hadith*. The Prophet of Islam observed that in worldly matters such as these, "you should act according to your experience, as you know these matters better." (*Sahih Muslim bi Sharh An-Nawawi*, 15/117)

This meant de-inking religion and science from one another. In this way scientific research acquired an atmosphere of freedom for its functioning. For the first time in human history science (human knowledge) could be developed freely without the intervention of religion. And advancing gradually, it culminated in the attainment of the modern age.

But, today man is again facing an even greater problem. That is, despite the extraordinary progress made in the field of science and technology, human beings are confronted with various kinds of problems, without there being any solution in sight. All these problems have resulted from not knowing the limit of freedom.

Modern man aspired to freedom as the highest good, but once having reached this goal, he was unable to set reasonable limits to freedom. In consequence, unrestrained freedom descended into anarchy and lawlessness. This is the actual cause of many of the problems which are emerging in modern times in western society. Now man requires an ideology which delimits his freedom, drawing the line between desirable and undesirable freedom. And it is only Islam which can provide him with such an ideology.

Now is the time for this ideology to be presented to man, who is ready and waiting to accept it. After the fall of communism (1991), the world is faced with an ideological vacuum. This vacuum can be filled by Islam alone. In the present world the developed countries have become economic or military superpowers, but the place is vacant for an ideological superpower, and that, potentially belongs to Islam.

There is only one obstacle in converting a great potential into a reality in favour of Islam. And that is the repeated recourse to violence by Muslim movements in modern times. Such action has presented Islam before the world in the guise of a violent religion. For this reason the man of today shies away from Islam. He fails to study Islam objectively. If this barrier could be removed and Islam once again brought before the world as a non-violent religion, or as a peaceful social system, then once again humanity would accept it, recognising it to be the voice of its own nature.

Modern man is in need of a new religion or a new system, based on peace. It should be free from superstitious beliefs, and should provide the answers to deep psychological questions. Its principles should not clash with scientific realities, and it should be supported by a victorious history.

Today no religion but Islam can lay such positive claims to acceptance, for it is Islam and Islam alone which fulfills all these conditions. Individually, there are many men and women today who, after having studied Islam, have acknowledged these unique qualities in Islam. Some have acknowledged them in theory while others have gone ahead and accepted Islam in practice.

Da'wah Activism

Islamic activism in respect of its method is based on non-violence and in respect of its target is based on *da'wah*. *Da'wah*, in fact, is another name for a peaceful struggle for the propagation of Islam. It would be true to say that Islamic activism in fact is *da'wah* activism.

The task of *da'wah* is no simple one. It enjoys the status of a key factor. If this task is fully performed, all other objectives will be automatically achieved. Here are certain references from the Qur'an in this connection.

1. Through *da'wah* the believers receive God's protection against the mischief of the opponents. (5:67)
2. Through *da'wah* even the direst of enemy turns into a dearest friend. (41:34)
3. *Da'wah* proves Islam's ideological superiority. And without doubt nothing is greater than the superiority of ideology. (10:32)
4. Through *da'wah* a positive mentality is inculcated within the *ummah*. This is called 'honest counsel' in the Qur'an. (7:68)
5. The mission of *da'wah* is performed by human beings but the conducive conditions for it are provided by God. Just as farming is to be done by the farmer while the rains come from God. In modern times favourable conditions have been fully provided to man. Now the believers' duty is to refrain from expending their energies in futile activities. They must exert their entire energy in *da'wah* work. All the best results will ensue from this act.
6. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, along with about two hundred of his companions left Makkah when the Makkan leaders had made it impossible for them to stay there. The Makkans had even decided to kill the Prophet. But the first speech the Prophet made on reaching Madinah had no taste of bitterness; neither did it contain any mention of vengeance or violence against the Quraysh.

On reaching Madinah the first priority was given to the task of entering into peace treaties with the tribes in and around Madinah, for instance with the Banu Khuza'a, etc. According to their pact neither would they fight against the Muslims nor would the Muslims fight against them. Most of the tribes in Arabia joined in these truce agreements.

But the Quraysh did not desist from aggression, and even engaged in certain military forays against the Muslims. Finally, in the sixth year of Hijrah, the Prophet succeeded in making a peace treaty with the Quraysh as well, at a place called Hudaibiya, albeit on acceptance of all the conditions laid down by the Quraysh.

Muslims Displaced

It is an incontrovertible fact that Muslims have not been able to join the mainstream in modern times. At all places and in every department they are leading their lives as if driven into a corner. This is undoubtedly an extremely critical problem, for it has relegated Muslims to second class positions all over the world.

To me, the greatest reason for this is the violent attitude of the Muslims. Today's Muslims are easily provoked and become violent at anything which is against their way of thinking. It is true that not all Muslims become involved in acts of violence. Yet all Muslims would be regarded involved in this matter. This is because that section of Muslims – in fact, the majority – who are not personally involved, neither disown those members of their community who are engaged in violence, nor even condemn them. In such a case, according to the Islamic shariah itself if the involved Muslims are directly responsible; the uninvolved Muslims are also indirectly responsible.

It is Muslims' religious and secular leaders who are actually responsible for this violent approach on the part of Muslims today. In modern times when Muslims have had to undergo the experience of defeat, almost all the religious and secular scholars as well as intellectuals followed one single line, that of awakening the spirit of *jihad* (in the sense of *qital*) among Muslims. The entire Muslim world reverberated with such slogans as '*jihad* is our way and *jihad* is the only solution to our problems!'

The entire world has witnessed a great number of large and small movements in violent response to the problems faced by Muslims. If you go to Palestine, you will hear the youth singing a song, no doubt taught to them by their elders:

Let's make war, let's make war,

For war is the way to success.

In modern times the violent approach of our intellectuals, and leaders of movements, is the sole reason for the present violent mentality among Muslims all over the world. It is as a result of this mentality that, if anyone writes a book against Islam, Muslims are prepared to kill the writer. If any procession raises anti-Muslim slogans, Muslims start stoning the procession instead of killing the evil by observing silence, which, as Umar Faruq advocated, would be the best strategy in such a case. If there is any monetary or territorial controversy with any nation, they immediately take up arms against it, rather than adopt a peaceful strategy to solve the problem.

This violent mentality of Muslims is responsible for having alienated them from their neighbours everywhere. Their conduct dearly shows that they no longer cherish the ideal of universal brotherhood. Everywhere they are looked upon with aversion and dread. One can even see notices on walls which say 'Beware of Muslims', instead of 'Beware of dogs.' And if these words are not inscribed on walls, they are certainly inscribed on the hearts and minds of the people. The resulting dissociation has left Muslims a

backward group in modern times. Even in advanced countries like America they remain backward as a community in comparison with other immigrant groups.

The only way to alleviate the tragic plight of Muslims is to bring them back to non-violent Islam, by helping them to understand that their violent version of Islam is not the true one.

As soon as Muslims take to the path of non-violent Islam, they will be able to become equal partners with other communities. They will have joined the universal mainstream, and will consequently be able to participate in all activities, in all institutions. People, instead of dreading them, will welcome them in every field. They will become a part of the universal brotherhood. Their issues will be looked upon with justice. Their equal partnership will be certain in all institutions ranging from the social to the educational.

Peaceful interaction will give Muslims the kind of intellectual stimulation and variety of experience which they must have if they are to tread the path of progress. Interaction will also facilitate the task of *da'wah* on a large scale. The natural result of this vast interaction of Muslims and non-Muslims will be that everywhere dialogue on Islam will be started, formally as well as informally. In modern times, because of the extremist and violent attitude of Muslims, serious dialogue between Islam and non-Islam has almost come to an end. Now when peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims takes place in a normal atmosphere, serious dialogue will ensue on its own. The beginning of serious dialogue between Islam and non-Islam is, without doubt, a very great success from the point of view of *da'wah*.

The Qur'an describes Sulh al-Hudaybiyya, in the early period of Islam as a 'clear victory'. It was a 'clear victory' in the sense that it established peace between the believers in *tawhid* and believers in *shirk*, thus making it possible for a serious dialogue to be held between the two on religious matters.

In modern times if Muslims abandon the path of violence and fully adopt the path of non-violence, this will be for Muslims like reviving the *sunnah* of Hudaybiyya. And they will start receiving those great benefits which Islam and Muslims had gained after the event of Hudaybiya in the first phase.

Peace and Justice

One great problem for Muslims is that peace does not necessarily guarantee them justice. This has caused Muslims to become violent and to neglect opportunities for *da'wah*. In modern times Muslims want a peace which brings them justice. But according to the law of nature, this kind of peace can never be achieved, that is why Muslims the world over are in a state of physical and mental unrest. Distressed in their minds, they have become violent in their thinking and in their actions.

The truth is that peace does not automatically produce justice. Peace in actual fact simply opens up opportunities for the achievement of justice. At the time of Hudaybiyya the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, had not found justice. He had achieved peace but only by delinking it from justice. The Prophet had made this peace not to exact justice but to receive the opportunities. And great

opportunities for *da'wah* action did open up with the establishment of peace. The Prophet exploited these opportunities in full measure. Therefore, in just a few years' time the Prophet not only ensured justice, but set Islam upon a much more solid footing.

The Muslims of the present day have to understand this secret of nature. Only then will it be possible for them first to find peace, then ultimately their desired goal of justice.

Conclusion

In October 1997, I met a 36-year old European, Leon Zippo Hayes, who was born in the city of Christchurch in New Zealand. After having studied Islam, he has changed his religion. His Islamic name is Khalilur Rahman. Passing through Muslim countries he is going to perform Hajj by land.

During the conversation he said that in modern times Muslims are engaged in bloody war at many places, at some places with others and at other places among themselves. This had led him (like many others) to conclude that perhaps Islam was a religion of violence. Later, he studied the Qur'an with the help of translations, and when he reached this verse in the Qur'an: 'Whoever killed a human being should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind (5:32),' he said that he was so moved that he could not believe that it was there in the Qur'an.

This incident is broadly indicative of the thinking of non-Muslims on Islam. On seeing the actions of Muslims, people today find it hard to believe that Islam may be a religion of peace. But if Muslims stop engaging in violent activities and give people the opportunity to appreciate Islam in its original form, then certainly a great number of people would realise as they never had before that Islam was a peaceful religion and they would rush to it, saying that it was exactly the religion which their souls had been seeking all along.

Preservation, Updating, *Da'wah*

Addressing the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, God Almighty has declared: We have sent you forth as a mercy to all mankind. (21:107) Similarly, the Qur'an states:

Blessed be He who has revealed *Al-Furqan* (the criterion), that is, the Qur'an, to His servant, so that he may be a warner to all mankind. (25:1)

In another chapter the Qur'an says: "We have sent you forth to all mankind, so that you may give them good news and warn them." (34:28)

These passages in the Qur'an tell us that the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was sent for all humanity and for all present and future generations. He was appointed by God Almighty to give a divine lead to all mankind, and this process has to be continued, generation after generation, till the last day of the world. During his lifetime he fulfilled this duty directly and, after his death, this task has to be continued indirectly through his *Ummah*. The task to be performed by later generations has been divided, basically, into three categories:

- (a) Process of Preservation,
- (b) Process of Updating,
- (c) Process of *da'wah*.

The goal of the first process is to keep the book brought by the Prophet intact in its original form, generation after generation. There must be no human interpolations and none of its parts should be destroyed.

The first major step in the process of preservation was undertaken, after the passing away of the Prophet, during the life of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr Siddiq. At that time tens of thousands of the companions of the Prophet had learnt the complete Qur'an by heart. It was thus completely preserved in human memory.

But as far as the writing of the Qur'an was concerned, it existed only in fragments on different kinds of writing materials. The first Caliphs, therefore, engaged scholars of the Qur'an from amongst the companions to prepare a single volume of the Qur'an. By employing the double checking system, that is, the Qur'an as memorized was checked with the Qur'an in its written form and the Qur'an in written form was checked with the Qur'an preserved in human memory. Thus the first caliph prepared the first bound volume of the Qur'an, which served as the standard copy. All the later copies of the Qur'an were made from this original volume.

Thus, the Qur'an was preserved by following the double method – writing and memorizing, generation

after generation, until it reached the age of the printing press, whereupon any possibility of human interpolation in the text was ruled out.

Contribution of *Muhaddithin* (Scholars of *Hadith*)

In addition to this, a huge number of eminent Muslim scholars arose among the first few generations of Islam to prepare a totally authentic and unparalleled historical record generally known as *Hadith*, *Sirah* and *Maghazi*. Within a surprisingly short period of time, they produced a vast and systematic body of literature that contains almost each word uttered by the Prophet, every action done by him, anything approved of or disapproved of by him, including other chronological details about his companions and the succeeding generations. This literature, as a whole, is rightly considered to be the second basic source of Islam after the Qur'an. The authentic part of *Hadith* literature coupled with the Qur'an, provides an all-inclusive text of Islamic ideology. Thus, by both the sources having been committed to writing, the original version of Islam has been so perfectly and permanently preserved, that until the coming of Doomsday, anybody can at any time confirm how Islamic teachings were revealed from God, and then how they were explained and practised by the Prophet and his companions.

Religious Institutions

Right from the days of the Companions of the Prophet up till the present times the majority of Muslims, both rulers and ruled, have shown the greatest of interest in and concern about imparting a theoretical as well as a practical knowledge of Islam to their offspring. For the purpose of learning how to practise Islam in day-to-day life in accordance with the prophetic role model, numerous institutions came into existence. The religious schools of the traditional type was called a *Madrasa*, while the spiritual training centre was called a *Takya*. Starting in the remote past and continuing right up to the present day, a tremendous network of such religious institutions has proliferated all over the Muslim world, and in recent times has been marked with renewed vigour and vitality. Without doubt these institutions have been successful in at least one of their fundamental objectives, that is, to preserve and transmit the practical form or applied aspect of Islam from generation to generation. In the present century, the same purpose has also been achieved by a number of other religious organizations and movements. The movement of Tabligh may be cited here as an example.

Updating

The second point in this connection is the process of updating. The religion handed down by the Prophet remains one and the same. However, since the situations in human society are subject to change, it becomes essential that the original religion (*al-din*) could be re-applied to changing sets of circumstances. For instance, the shariah permitted the touching of leather socks with wet hands for purification instead of the normal washing of feet during ablution. Now when socks made of artificial

fibres came to be used, the question arose as to whether doing *masah* (rubbing with water) was lawful or not. Then it became necessary to re-apply the old injunction to the new situation; after the exercise of *ijtihad*, permission was given to do *masah* on these socks.

In every age the necessity arises of re-applying divine injunctions. And this has happened in modern times on a large scale. In ancient times war was a means of settling conflicts, but with the invention of the latest deadly weapons, war today serves no positive purpose. Now power lies in peace alone. Such is the state of affairs that the commands of war in Islam require a reapplication. In days gone by, kingship, whereby the ruler unilaterally possessed absolute power, was the order of the day. Now it is the age of democracy, which is another name for the politics of power sharing.

Changed situations in every age demand that efforts be made towards adaptation of the injunctions of Islam to meet new exigencies. This is the way that the Islamic *shariah* continues to be updated. This task of updating is performed through *ijtihad*, a process which, in any community, requires creative thinking. And the essential condition for creative thinking lies in people having full freedom of expression, including that of criticism. This is why Islam has accorded such freedom to everyone, it is in an atmosphere in which every thing and everyone is open to criticism that creativity is developed. Creative minds alone can perform the task of *ijtihad* at the highest level. Where there is no such open intellectual atmosphere, the process of mental development will come to a halt and that of updating as well.

Updating: Reapplication of *Shariah*

According to the Qur'an, there are two major parts of Islam – religion (*din*) and the law (*Shariah*). *Din* or *al-din* is basic and absolute, always remaining the same, without the slightest change. It is obligatory for all believers, whatever the circumstances, and entails belief in the One God, and the worship of Him alone. The *Shariah*, on the other hand, may differ, depending upon times and places.

On the subject of *al-din* the Qur'an has this to say: He has ordained for you the same *Din* which He enjoined on Nuh (Noah) and which We have revealed to you and which we enjoined on Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isa (Jesus) (saying): Observe this *din* and be not divided therein. (42:13).

On the other hand, there is another verse of the Qur'an which tells us that the *Shariat* given to different prophets were not always identical. The Qur'an states:

We have ordained a law (*Shariah*) and a path for each of you. And had God so willed He would have made you all a single community, but He wanted to try you by what He had given you. Vie with each other then in good works, for to God you shall all return and he will resolve for you your differences. (5:48)

The *Shariah* or external structure of the commands of Islam, and the *minhaj*, or method varied from prophet to prophet, but only in a partial, not a total sense. It should be borne in mind also that such differences as these were related not to individual prophets but to the changed situations. The different

circumstances of the times each prophet lived in were taken into account in the commands they were given in terms of the *Shariah* and *minhaj*. These variations were based on the practical wisdom rather than related to the person of a particular prophet. That is why this principle of *Shariah* is valid even today.

The principle of the change in situations governing partial and temporal alterations in the *Shariah* and *minhaj* is duly adopted. While in the past this change was carried out through the Prophet, modifications are now arrived at through *ijtihad* and carried into effect by the Islamic scholars.

That task in reality is not synonymous with bringing about a change in 'the *shariah*' but it is only a re-application of the *shariah* in terms of altered circumstances. The task of effecting such re-application, which was undertaken in the past, will in like manner, continue to be carried out in the future. It is this process of continual adjustment which helps to keep Islam permanently updated.

Da'wah

The third requirement for this continuation of the Prophetic mission is *da'wah* work. That is, to communicate the message of the Prophet to all people in all ages.

Though this *da'wah* work is carried out by human beings, it is, in fact, a divine task. That is why the Qur'an has called it *nusrat* of God i.e., helping the Almighty (3:52).

According to the Qur'an *da'wah* work means to make oneself *nasih* and *amin*, that is, an honest and sincere well-wisher of all. (7:68).

In short, it is to become wholly honest in relation to God and to feel and evince total goodwill towards all one's fellow men. *Da'wah* work can be properly performed only by meeting this standard. One important condition for the performance of *da'wah* work is patience. This virtue was exemplified by the conduct of the early *da'is*: "We will exercise patience regardless of the harm inflicted upon us." (Qur'an, 14:12)

This verse of the Qur'an tells us of the character of the *da'i*. The *da'i* in relation to the *mad'u* adopts the attitude of patience unilaterally. He continues his process of *da'wah* work in a peaceful manner despite provocation from the other party. This is an extremely essential condition. If the *da'i* is provoked by the behaviour of the *madu*, the normal atmosphere between *da'i* and *mad'u* will be disturbed, – and the whole process of *da'wah* work will be ruined. It goes without saying that a conducive atmosphere is necessary for the successful carrying out of *da'wah* action.

The most important aspect of this *da'wah* work is that through it God's message continues to be communicated to people in every age. Another aspect, no less important, is that people from different spheres continue to enter the fold of Islam. It is like the introduction of new blood to the old blood into the believer. In this way the Muslim community saves itself from the natural process of degeneration. This is the only way of keeping the Muslim community revitalized at all times. On the other hand, the

more the true message of Islam spreads through the *da'wah* process around the globe, the more its textual, ideological and practical preservation is ensured, and the more Islam gains from the enlightenment and genius of freshly initiated minds – a factor which will keep its teachings updated for the generations to come.